

NEWS

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Former West Long Branch Councilman Sentenced to 15 Months in Federal Prison for Bribery

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NEWARK – Former West Long Branch councilman Joseph DeLisa was sentenced to 15 months in federal prison today on a charge of extortion for taking a \$1,500 cash bribe in an Atlantic City hotel room from someone he believed to be a corrupt contractor seeking business with the borough, U.S. Attorney Christopher J. Christie announced.

United States District Judge William J. Martini, also ordered Joseph DeLisa, 50, to pay a \$5,000 fine and to serve three years on supervised release upon the completion of his prison sentence. Judge Martini continued DeLisa's \$50,000 unsecured appearance bond pending his surrender to the U.S. Bureau of Prisons on a date to be determined.

DeLisa pleaded guilty before Judge Martini on Nov. 15, 2006, to one count of extortion under color of official right.

At his plea hearing, DeLisa, a councilman from January 1998 through February 2005, admitted that on Nov. 19, 2003, he met the man he believed to be a demolition contractor in the Atlantic City hotel room and accepted the \$1,500 in cash from him.

DeLisa admitted that former West Long Branch Mayor Paul Zambrano introduced him to the contractor, who was actually an FBI cooperating witness, in about October 2003. DeLisa admitted that he and Zambrano agreed that DeLisa would assist the contractor in obtaining demolition and other public contracts from the borough.

Zambrano pleaded guilty to the same charge on Aug. 24, 2005, and admitted that he accepted cash payments totaling \$15,000 dollars from a confidential FBI informant. Zambrano's sentencing remains unscheduled.

DeLisa's and Zambrano's guilty pleas arose from Operation Bid Rig, the same investigation which led to charges being filed against 13 officials and two contractors in February, March and April 2005, including the mayors of Hazlet and Keyport, as well as councilmen from Asbury Park, Far Hills, Keyport, Neptune Township, Middletown and West Long Branch.

In determining the sentence, Judge Martini consulted the advisory U.S. Sentencing Guidelines, which provide appropriate sentencing ranges that take into account the severity and characteristics of the offense, the defendant's criminal history, if any, and other factors. The judge, however, was not bound by those guidelines in determining a sentence.

Parole has been abolished in the federal system. Defendants who are given custodial terms must serve nearly all that time.

Christie credited Special Agents from the FBI, under the direction of Acting Special Agent in Charge Pedro Ruiz, with developing the case against DeLisa.

The case is being prosecuted by Assistant U.S. Attorneys Marc Larkins, Chief of the Government Fraud Unit, and Rachael A. Honig of the Special Prosecutions Division of the U.S. Attorney's Office in Newark.

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Defense Counsel:

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